



# Al-Risala 1985

August

## Editorial

A petition moved by one Chandmal Chopra in the Calcutta High Court urged that a ban be put on the publication of the Qur'an. The petitioner had it that the Qur'an taught violence and hatred. Initially Miss. Justice Padma Khastgir entertained the petition and fixed a date, May 2, for its hearing. But in the meantime this petition came in for severe criticism. Even the state Government and the Central Government themselves intervened to bring pressure to bear upon the court to see an end to this case.

In view of the gravity of the situation, the case was transferred from Ms. Padma Justice Khastgir to Mr. Justice B.M. Basak, who arranged for an immediate hearing of the case on May 13. The petition was dismissed on the same date. Later, on May 17, he gave a detailed verdict, which ran into 18 pages, giving reasons for dismissing the controversial petition on the Qur'an. He observed:

"Banning or forfeiture of the Quran would amount to abolition of the Muslim religion itself, as it could not exist without the Quran. Such abolition is unthinkable."

"Further, it would take away the secularity of India and violate article 25 of the constitution which guarantees all people freedom of conscience and the right to profess, practice and to propagate religion."

Here indeed, is a point to ponder. Fourteen hundred years ago, when the ancient Meccan leaders made an attempt to put a ban on the Quran, they were so successful that the prophet and his followers had to leave his home town Mecca, for Medina. How then was it that fourteen hundred years later, when certain hostile elements wanted to impose a legal ban on the self and same Quran, they failed in their attempt? Even the government, albeit secular, resisted their attempt and the West Bengal Advocate General, S.K. Acharaya and the Attorney General Parasaran dismissed the petition, arguing vehemently against it.

The reason is attributable to the difference between the age we live in and the age when the Qur'an was being revealed. The early centuries of the millennium were marked by religious fanaticism and violence; on the contrary, the present age is one of comparative freedom. In the majority of the countries it is accepted that every individual has the right to accept, profess, and propagate the religion of his choice. In the present age, if any government were to place such curbs on individuals, it would be accused of conservatism and anachronism.

This incident shows that present age has opened out vast opportunities which had never before existed. In the past the preaching of a religion was the most difficult task as it was likely to meet with stiff resistance. Today there is no obstacle in the path of propagating a faith, and we should not hesitate to take full advantage of this situation. Indeed, it is the greatest and most pressing need of the hour.

## One God

Abdullah Ibn Masood has related a saying of the prophet in these words: "One who will have even an iota of pride, will not enter haven." On being asked what pride consisted of, he explained, "to ignore and reject the truth and look down upon people." Here is a relevant verse from the Qur'an:

"God will not forgive those who associate other gods with Him; but He will forgive whom He will for other sins. He that associates other gods with Him is guilty of heinous sin."

There is, in fact, nothing more contrary to the true nature of things than to exalt objects other than God. This is the greatest crime in the eyes of God. Ascribing greatness to oneself is pride and evincing feelings of reverence for other living or dead objects is polytheism. The discovery of God demolishes all other notions of greatness including one's own.

This world is a testing ground. Here all kinds of people are allowed to stay and partake of the blessings of God. But the world of the hereafter shall be an ideal world. There only those will be given positions of honour who have proved worthy of it in the present period of trial; who were capable of distinguishing the real from the false. Leading a life of pride and polytheism is to live on an unrealistic plane. Those who opt for such a life in this world will have rendered themselves unworthy of inhabiting the eternal world. Paradise is for those sublime souls who constantly live in the greatness of God. Hell is for those lowly, debased souls who either bask in their own sense of greatness or who revere some other objects besides God.

## Islamic Law and Divorce

The family is a very complex unit. Its continued existence depends on a clear understanding of what is meant by the family as an institution and maintaining a proper balance of all its constituent elements. The slightest imbalance can upset the whole system.

Such problems arose in connection with marriage and divorce in Western societies, because of misapprehensions regarding the conjugal state that laws had to be passed in order to reform traditional concepts which were no longer relevant to the modern context. One such law made it incumbent upon a man who divorced his wife to pay her a heavy sum and, in addition, to make regular payments of alimony till her death.

This law was passed obviously to reform family life, but it proved to have the opposite effect. When people saw that the business of divorce involved great financial difficulties, there began a trend to do away with the marriage bond altogether. Men and women started to live together without going through the formality of the marriage ceremony. Now more than 50 percent of the younger generation prefers to live in the unmarried state.

Bertrand Russell, one of Britain's most outstanding intellectuals, married and divorced three times on grounds of intellectual incompatibility. This proved to be a costly bargain, and he suffered great financial setbacks because he had to pay his wives enormous sums as the law demanded. He writes in his *Autobiography*:

" ... the financial burden was heavy and rather disturbing: I had given £10,000 of my Nobel Prize cheque for a little more than £11,000 to my third wife, and I was now paying alimony to her and to my second wife as well as paying for the education of my younger son. Added to this, there were heavy expenses in connection with my elder son's illness; and the income taxes which for many years he had neglected to pay now fell to me to pay." Bertrand Russell, *Autobiography*, Unwin Paperbacks (London) 1978, pp. 563-64.

The Islamic law concerning marriage and divorce takes into account every aspect of family life. It does not make undue concessions to one party at the cost of the other. When men and women come together, they vow to live together for life but, at times, for various reasons, one or the other party is compelled to opt for separation. For such occasions Islam has provided clear instructions so that the separation is effected in an environment of good will. The husband is held responsible for the maintenance of the divorced wife for a period of three months in normal conditions, and for a longer period in case the woman is pregnant. After this fixed period the husband is not legally bound for providing her maintenance. This principle does not lay such an inordinate burden on men as to lead

them to consider the marriage bond irksome to the point of being intolerable. There is no compulsion then for them to flout convention and fall into immoral ways.

This Islamic principle may cause suffering to some women in exceptional cases, but such instances are exceptions, not rules.

It is an established principle followed by all the law-making bodies of the world that laws should be formed according to general requirements rather than complying to an exaggerated degree with exceptional requirements.

Howsoever elaborately a law is framed; it is seldom that it can cover every single aspect of the human condition, and every set of circumstances which can occur in life. There will always be loopholes and exceptions which can create moral and legal problems. Such cases are always treated entirely on their individual merits on a moral or social level throughout the world.

5 August 1985

### Those who are ready to perform menial tasks show themselves fit for great ones

The journalist James Cameron, who died on January 27, 1985, ended his career at the very pinnacle of his profession. In an obituary to Cameron, Tom Bairstow called him “the outstanding reporter of his troubled age and a supreme stylist.” He started his career, however, in the most menial of manners, filling editorial paste pots at the age of 16, for 15 shillings a week (about Rs. 12/-). His way to the top was a hard one, “through the educative rigours of an apprenticeship in D.C. Thomson’s dreary Dundee wordmill, where a laddie was expected to do a man’s job and be quick about it.”

*(The Guardian Weekly, February 3, 1985)*

## The Superior Eye

There was a marriage reception at Hotel Taj Palace in New Delhi on 11 February 1985. It was hosted by Mr. P.S. Soni, a businessman, to celebrate the marriage of his son. About 400 people from eminent families participated in it.

When the reception was in full swing, a lady, a Mrs. Santosh Soni, suddenly found that she had lost her purse which contained more than 50,000 in cash.

Neither the owners of the purse nor any of the other guests saw anyone steal it. It appeared to be a complete mystery. The thief had done his job and the person who was robbed could do nothing but go back home in a state of utter depression. Even the security officers at the hotel did not believe their story and said it was all a fabrication. They did not, therefore, make an attempt to close the doors immediately or carry out any kind of search.

It was at this point that someone had the idea of replaying the entire marriage proceedings and the reception which had been recorded on a video-tape.

Without further ado, video tape was shown to the security officers and guests. Minutes ago the attention of the people had been fixed on the bride and the bridegroom up on their stage – a source of great happiness and enjoyment for everyone. Now the same scene which had been such a source of enjoyment, was being looked at on a small screen with curiosity and suspicion.

Soon all eyes were fixed on two women, dressed as ayas, who had entered the hall with a child. The people present had just ignored them when they entered, thinking that they must be the ayas of some guests, but now they watched them as potential criminals. These two women had obviously been quite ignorant of the Video Camera whose eyes were constantly on the watch recording each and every movement they made, as they walked to and fro.

Finally one of the ayas was seen extending her hand from her shawl, swiftly picking up the purse and hiding it inside her clothes at the exact moment when the owner of the purse was busy posing for photographs.

The event which had remained hidden from people's eyes was revealed through the eyes of the video camera which had gone on photographing the whole scene. The police were immediately called in, and the whole film was replayed before them. The crime was solved; the woman was identified and arrested by the police. Her name is said to be Sheela, a resident of Sultanpuri. While bringing out the details of this story the *Hindustan Times* has this significant comment to make:

You can not only spot the thief, but see her commit the crime.

This worldly event mirrors the event that will take place in the next world. This event, by analogy, illustrates the fact that there is a superior eye which is watching all of us, and recording with great precision every detail that is hidden from our eyes. That eye knows what is unknown to the people and sees what eludes our vision.

Worldly events are indeed a reflection of the other world. But a discerning eye is needed to interpret them.



## De-Fusing the Tension

On the 11th of December, 1984, the Pakistani Ambassador, Mr. Abdul Wahid, laid the foundation stone in Rome of what will be the biggest mosque in Europe, its builders having fought and won a 10 year battle with Italian bureaucracy and special interest groups.

The \$30 million mosque, sprawling over an area of 7.4 acre, financed by 24 Arab countries, and designed by an Arab and an Italian, will have a prayer room for 2000 people and a library and study centre for Islamic students.

For several years now, we have been coming across news items of this nature. Big new mosques and spacious Islamic centres are being set up in various parts of the world. This marks a revival of religion after a lapse of a few centuries.

The modern world has ushered in vast and hitherto unconceived opportunities for the propagation of Islam. They are there simply waiting to be seized. The only thing required from Muslims now is, unilaterally, to de-fuse the existing tension with non-Muslim nations. By putting an end to the hostile atmosphere based on political, financial and other such worldly consideration, they can bring about an environment conducive to greater receptivity to the ideas of Islam. It is the duty of Muslims all over the world to smooth relationships. This would enable listeners to lend a serious ear to the message conveyed to them. The day Muslims realize the importance of de-fusing tension will mark the dawn of a new era.

\* Based on an AFP report in the *Times of India* 13 December 1984

## A Word Can Make All the Difference

*With the exception of the Qur'an, all divine scriptures are available only in the form of translations, in which distortion of the meaning of words is inevitable. So the Qur'an is the only truly authentic divine scripture that remains in man's possession.*

According to the Bible, God created the world in "six days". This account has, in recent times, come into direct conflict with scientific data. As Dr Maurice Bucaille writes in *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*:

"The idea that successive phases of the Creation ... could have been compressed into the space of one week is one that cannot be defended from a scientific point of view. Today we are perfectly aware that the formation of the Universe and the Earth took place in stages that lasted for very long periods (p. 27)."

When we read about the creation of the universe in most English translations of the Qur'an, we also find reference to a process lasting "six days" (7:54). But when we look at the original Arabic Qur'an we find that the word used for "day" (Yaum, pl. Ayyam) is one that does not necessarily refer to the interval of time that elapses between two successive sunrises or sunsets for an inhabitant of the earth. The word can also mean "a period of time" as is clear from these verses of the Qur'an:

"He governs all things from heaven to earth. And in the end it will ascend to Him in one day, a day whose space is a thousand years by your reckoning (32: 5)."

"... Each day with your Lord is like a thousand years in your reckoning (22: 47)."

"He is the Lord of the Ladders, by which the angels and the Spirit will ascend to Him in one day: a day whose space is fifty thousand years (70: 3-4)."

By referring to the original Arabic Qur'an, therefore, we are able to ascertain that the creation of the heavens and the earth was conducted over what we may call "six periods", or as Abdullah Yusuf Ali writes in his commentary on the Qur'an (1934), six "stages in the evolution of physical nature (p. 1290)." There is no difficulty in accepting this description in the light of modern scientific data.

This shows how important it is that we should be in possession of the original version of divine scriptures. Translations are unable to convey the full meaning of the original and sometimes they distort the meaning beyond all bounds of credibility. By referring to the original Qur'an we are able to establish that the "days" in which God created the universe were not days as we know them; they were days as God knows them, which can extend over thousands of years. If we were able to refer to the Bible in its original, untranslated form, then no doubt we would find a word open to similar interpretation. But all

we have are translations, and translations refer only to “six days”, a day being the “time for one rotation of the earth, period of 24 hours as unit of time” (Oxford Dictionary). The notion of a creation spreading over six “days” of this nature is quite untenable when viewed in the light of modern knowledge: there is no way that these “days” could have even existed when the mechanism that causes them to appear – that is, the existence of the earth and its rotation around the sun – had not yet come into being.

There have been many divine scriptures, four of which – the Torah, the Psalms, the Gospel which is now incorporated in the modern Bible, and the Qur’an – are explicitly mentioned in the Quran. But the Quran is the only one that exists in its original form and in the language in which it was revealed. This means that the Quran is the only book of God which can now be a source of true guidance, for, as shown above, misinterpretation of just one word of the scriptures, which is inevitable in translations, can cause distortion of a vast realm of cosmic knowledge.

9 August 1985

### Man's conscience rebels against evil

A man in Kansas, U.S.A. entered a petrol station, went up to the confectionary counter and, pulling out a gun, told the attendant to empty the till. As he did so, he said to her: "Lady, I'm sorry." Explaining that he was out of work, he told her to empty the contents of the cash register into a paper bag. But before the register was empty, he said he had enough. He then offered the attendant the rest of the money. "In the morning, I'm going to hate myself for this," he said as he made good his getaway, with less than 100 dollars in his pocket.

## Keeping one's Mind on Tomorrow

In 1898 Lord Curzon was appointed Viceroy of India. He had two daughters. When Lady Curzon was expecting their third child, both she and her husband were hoping that it would be a boy. Their hopes were dashed, however, when in March 1904, another baby girl was born to them. The couple was staying in Naldara at the time of the birth, and they named their daughter Alexandra Naldara Curzon after the place. Later on Lady Curzon returned to London. In one of the letters that Lord Curzon wrote to her from the summer capital Simla, he consoled her with these words:

"After all what does sex matter after we both of us are gone."

May be these words just signified an attempt on Lord Curzon's part to hide his frustration. But the reality that he expressed is one that will solve most of life's problems, if one becomes really conscious of it.

Man desires money, offspring and power more than anything in this world. He does all he can to acquire them. But if one thinks about it, finally one is going to leave all these things behind. What is the good of having something which one is bound to lose? If people were only to realize this, they would become content with what they have. The oppression and cruelty that is perpetrated in the world because of greed would stop.

There is not much difference between finding and losing in this world for no value is attached to finding something when one is only going to lose it. How much effort man puts into acquiring wealth in this world: yet the inevitable result of his efforts is that he leaves everything behind. Every life eventually ends in death. When death comes, it tears one away from the things one was most attached to on earth.

People are living for the present; they have completely forgotten about the future. They think they can build a happy life for themselves by bringing destruction upon others. They do not realize that they themselves are bound for the grave. They seek to ruin others financially by bringing suits against them in human courts. But it is they themselves who are heading for ruin; it is they who will be brought up in the divine court to be judged. They ignore others and take delight in their own glory, ignorant of the fact that soon their vainglory will vanish into thin air, and they will be exposed for the helpless creatures that they are.

## Belief and Disbelief

Man has an innate need for something to depend upon in this world, something which he can look up to. To believe in God is to look up to Him alone, while disbelief is to live in veneration of others besides Him.

In ancient times awe of natural phenomena, such as the moon and the sun dominated people's lives. In the modern age, however, man has become more materialistic, finding fulfillment in such things as wealth, and the greatness of other human beings. Whatever the object of his veneration may be, man is satisfying an instinctive urge in looking up to these things, and depending upon them. The urge is real enough, but such means of fulfilling it, which amount to worship of others besides God, are false.

To truly believe in God is to find the true answer to the human search for a superior. It is to see through superficial forms to the ultimate reality that lies hidden within all things.

A believer is one who is not beguiled by the outward splendour of worldly things. He realizes that everything has been created by God. He is not overawed by things of material grandeur, because he knows that they, like him, have been created by God. He does not look to mortals for fulfillment of his needs, for he knows that they themselves are helpless before God – that all are in truth His humble servants. He presses on until, passing all creation by, he reaches the Creator himself.

A believer is one who acknowledges that everything is from God. Seeing that he has no power in this world, he looks to God for help and protection. The beauty of this world serves to remind him of God's beauty; the greatness of natural phenomena impresses on him the greatness of the One who created them. So absorbed is he in the glory of God that he loves nothing more than to spend his time singing the praises of the Lord.

To believe in God is to see the invisible force behind visible objects. This requires special vision, enabling one to penetrate superficial forms and perceive the reality of all things. One endowed with such vision sees God everywhere; he looks only to God as great. He submits entirely to God, and trusts in Him alone. So engrossed in God's overpowering greatness does he become that all worldly creatures, including himself, fade into insignificance in his sight.

## Staying Cool

The most delicate and dangerous part of space journeys is when the spacecraft returns to the earth's atmosphere. Take the case of the Apollo-8 spacecraft, for instance. Before the capsule touched down on December 27, 1968, it had to negotiate a precipitous return to the earth's atmosphere. Because of the earth's gravity – seven times that of outer space – the speed of the spacecraft soared, reaching an astronomical 39,000 kilometres per hour. Because of its extraordinary speed, the heat of the spacecraft rose to terrifying proportions. Air friction started heating up the space vessel as soon as it entered the earth's atmosphere. Soon it became literally red hot, reaching a temperature of 3,300 degrees Celsius.

No animal can survive at such a temperature. How was it, then, that the three American astronauts aboard the craft were able to remain unaffected by the blazing inferno that had built up around them? The reason that they were able to return safely to earth was that the spacecraft in which they were traveling had been constructed in such a way that its interior would not be affected by the severity of conditions on the outside. In spite of the incredible heat on the outside, inside the craft the temperature was just 21 degrees Celsius. Imagine – 3,300 degrees on the outside; 21 degrees on the inside.

This event out of the realm of space travel has an important lesson to teach us in our lives on earth. Time and time again we run into highly charged situations in life. Outwardly, it seems impossible to go on. There is only one way to survive under such conditions, and that is by not letting oneself be inwardly affected by one's outward situation; by suppressing one's emotions and keeping one's feelings under control. Only then will one be able to maintain one's inward cool. One will not be able to survive crises in life if one lets one's inward condition become as highly charged as one's outward situation. If, on the other hand, one remains inwardly calm and composed, then one will be able to survive the heat of external circumstances, and safely reach one's destination.

If there is hate and anger directed against one from the outside, one must not let such feelings get inside one; instead one should cultivate feelings of pardon and forgiveness in one's own heart. If the whole world wishes one evil, still one should only have good feelings for others. There is no other way of succeeding in life. If one adopts the same feelings as one's outside environment, then the challenges of life are sure to be more than one can bear.

## The Great Happening

The Prophet Mohammad once asked his companion, Abdullah Ibn Masood, to read him a part of the Quran. "Me – read the Quran to you, when unto you it has been revealed?" Ibn Masood asked. "Yes," the Prophet answered; I like to hear it read by someone else." So Abdullah Ibn Masood started reciting Surah Al-Nisa. When he reached this verse, the Prophet asked him to stop:

How will it be when we produce a witness from every nation and call upon you to testify against them?  
(4: 41)

Abdullah Ibn Masood looked at the Prophet and saw that tears were flowing from both his eyes.

What an awesome event the setting up of God's court of justice will be. There will be no occasion for contumacy or denial. Those whom people disregarded in the world, they will be the ones to be brought forward as God's witnesses; for they were God's witnesses on earth, warning mankind of the doom to come. They were thought of as the most insignificant people on earth, but it will be their testimony that decides people's eternal fate.

Think of the state of those who were loquacious in the world, but find themselves without words on that day; and of those who wield power and prestige, only to be divested of all traces of might. Superficial veils will be rent asunder, and those who feigned false piety will be exposed for the hypocrites they were. The tables will indeed turn on that day, when many who are last in the world will be first in the sight of God, and the filth and pollution of what had seemed pure and attractive will be revealed before the eyes of man. Much that man looks upon with relish now; he will turn away in horror from then.

People's real natures are concealed in this world. For some, attractive words have hidden their inner states and for others material splendour. But in the next world these things will be taken away from man; he will be brought forward in his real state. What a calamitous day that will be. If one were to gauge the severity of that day, then one would cease to talk so ferociously, or be so allured by worldly things; worldly honour would seem just as meaningless as worldly disgrace.

Whoever knocks persistently ends by entering.

–ALI



## Judging on Merit

Imam Muhammad Ibn Idris Ash-Shafii, the founder of one of the four orthodox sects of Sunnis, was born at Askalon in Palestine in A.H. 150. He was a contemporary of Abbasid Caliph, Harun Rashid.

Nature had endowed him with extraordinary talents. It is said that at seven years of age he had got the whole Quran by rote, at ten he had committed to memory the Muwatta of Malik and at fifteen he obtained the rank of Mufti. He passed the earlier part of his life at Gaza, in Palestine; there he completed his education and afterwards moved to Mecca, the home of great religious scholars. Imam Shafii was at that time in great financial straits. Being an intelligent, sincere and hardworking student, he attracted the attention of his colleagues and teachers. When the governor of Yemen happened to visit Mecca, the nobles of Mecca introduced him to the governor and strongly recommended that he be offered some official post. The governor granted their request and appointed him the A'mil (collector of revenues) of Yemen.

The uncompromising attitude of Imam Shafii soon led him into trouble with the governor of Yemen who was a cruel and unjust man. Imam Shafii could not help but advise him on certain occasions to deal justly with the affairs of the state, and restrain himself from violating the laws. Instead of paying heed to this advice, the governor turned against him and began to look for ways and means to punish him for his audacity.

He soon found a pretext in Shafii's political thought which he supposed provocative enough to set the caliph himself against him. He immediately wrote to the Caliph Harun Rasheed that Shafii was one of the adherents of the Alavi Sayyeds. Since the Alavi Sayyeds were the rivals of the regime of that time, nothing could have raised the ire of the caliph more than this. The caliph was ignorant of the fact that Imam Shafii spent his time in the sincere pursuit of learning and he had no involvement in politics. He, therefore, wrongly judged him as a potential threat to his government and gave orders for his arrest as well as that of his companions. He was then brought to the capital, Baghdad, for prosecution.

At this critical hour, Imam Muhammad, a religious scholar of repute, who was looked upon with favour by the caliph was present in the city. On hearing that Imam Shafii had been brought to the court as a criminal, he immediately rushed to the court to intercede for him. He assured the caliph that, far from being a rebel, Imam Shafii was a great religious scholar who had nothing to do with politics and that it was his enemies who had involved him for their own selfish purposes. The caliph was convinced and the release of the great scholar secured. This incident occurred in 104 H, when he was only 34 years old; he was yet to reach the pinnacle of his fame. Indeed Imam Shafii was treated so cruelly simply because his career was still in the making, and he had yet to acquire the honourable title of 'Imam Shafii'. People fail to judge others on merit; too often it is the outward splendour which plays the decisive role.

## Freedom and Morality

One of the world's first surrogate mothers has told of the anguish she and her family have suffered and warned other women against "renting their wombs."

Elizabeth Kane, from Chicago, said her husband was so horrified that he became physically ill after she gave birth to a baby boy through artificial insemination for \$5,600.

"I cannot recommend to my friends ever to become surrogate mothers." She said in an interview.

This is an example which shows how a life free from all restrictions can become a source of deep anxiety. A proper attitude for man, therefore, would be one which takes into account all the aspects – psychological, biological, sociological, familial and the like – and his behaviour should be in accordance with this.

The limitations and restrictions imposed by the divine law exist, in actual fact, to cover such aspects of life. The solution to our problems lies in submission to the divine path ordained by God. In attempting to set ourselves free of them, we lose our moral balance. This culminates in problems which have no solutions. The emergence of such anomalies in a society, which can amount to evils, has been described in the Quran in these words:

Do not make mischief in the earth after it has been purged (7: 56).

Do not corrupt the land after it has been purged of evil. That is best for you, if you are true believers (7: 85).

16 August 1985

## The World We Long For

To disbelieve in paradise is to disbelieve in one's own self, for paradise is what everyone longs for more than anything. If, on the other hand, one believes in paradise but does not strive to attain it, one is like a person who goes to a shop to buy something, but is not ready to pay the required price.

Everyone longs for a dream world – a world of everlasting life and total satisfaction, a place immune from the limitations and disadvantages that beset us in this world. This is what man longs for above all else. Everyone in this world is striving to achieve this end, yet there is no one who actually finds what they desire. People go to great pains to make themselves healthy, but soon they are beset by illness or old-age; they accumulate wealth, but it does not endow them with inner peace; they seek power, only to find that power creates more problems for them; they surround themselves with luxuries and comforts, but soon fall prey to boredom and unrest.

All human-beings are busy building a paradise for themselves, but before they can do so death comes and they leave the world with all their longings and desires unfulfilled. They then go to a world where paradise is awaiting them. But the paradise of the next world will only be inhabited by those who have paid the price for it in this world. Those who fail to do so are depriving themselves of what they long for more than anything.

In paradise, we shall have all that we desire. But paradise lies in the next world, and it will only be inhabited by those who have sought it there. Those who build a paradise for themselves in this world will find nothing but disappointment awaiting them when they reach the next world.

And what an agonizing disappointment that will be; for they will find themselves deprived of the very thing they had been seeking all their lives. How ironic that one's attempts to fashion in this world what is meant to be fashioned in the next, should lead one to lose out on it for all time. How tragic that one's efforts to achieve one's greatest longing in life are in fact condemning one to live without it.

And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.

–St. Matthew

## God's Signs

"Surely in the heavens and the earth there are signs for the faithful; in your own creation, and in the beasts that are scattered far and near, are signs for true believers; in the alternation of night and day, in the sustenance God sends down from heaven with which He revives the earth after its death, and in the marshalling of the winds, are signs for men of understanding."

(Qur'an, 45:3-5)

There are multiple verses in the Quran which point out that there are signs in the universe for men of understanding. God requires man to believe in certain hidden realities. To make this easier he has set up material symbols of these realities in the outside world. What man has to do is see the reflection of invisible realities in the mirror of visible signs.

The sun and the moon give us a glimpse of God – the source of all light. The birds and the animals provide us with a picture of innocence; as such they are God's representatives on our planet. The sky in its vastness gives us an idea of the might and greatness of God. Wind and water show us the mercy of the One who created them. The trees and the mountains provide a pointer to His exquisite beauty.

If a person opens his mind to the wonders of the world, taking in all that he sees in the universe, then he will find the light of God shining in all that he beholds. He will see the divine wisdom that lies behind every object of creation. The cosmos in all its vastness will serve as a constant reminder of the infinity of God. The earth and the heavens will become manifestations of His splendour; by observing them he will come to know the Lord.

## Words can be false friends

Words because of their easy accessibility can be a great source of misconception in this world. Equipped with fine words and carried away by slogans, one can be deluded into thinking that one is on the right path. But words alone can not prove whether or not one's stand is a right one. Success in the next world will be for those who having made a critical appraisal of words hold on to the truth and reality behind them, rather than placing their trust uncritically in hollow, meaningless words.

## The Message of the Qur'an

### CHAPTER II, (contd.)

"To Moses We gave the Scripture and after him We sent other messengers. We gave Jesus, the son of Mary, clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit. Will you then scorn each apostle, whose message does not suit your fancies, charging some with imposture and slaying others? They say: 'Our hearts are sealed.' But God has cursed them for their unbelief. They have but little faith. And when a Book confirming their own has come to them from God, while before that they used to pray for help against those who disbelieved – when there came to them what they knew to be true they denied it. But the curse of God is upon those without faith. Miserable is the price for which they have sold their souls: that they should deny God's own revelation, grudging that He should reveal His bounty to whom he chooses of His servants. They have incurred wrath upon wrath. An ignominious punishment awaits the unbelievers (2:87-90)."

The Torah was the Book of God, revealed to the Jews. Gradually, however, the Jews ceased to treat it as a source of divine guidance and came to regard it as a sacred relic of their national heritage, a symbol of ethnic superiority; it became more a guarantee of salvation than a guide as to how salvation can be earned. After Moses, several prophets arose among the Jewish people – Joshua, David, Zakaria, John the Baptist and finally Jesus, to name but a few – all of whom stressed to the Jews that it was not enough just to revere the Torah as a holy book, its teachings had to be actually practised; it is no good believing in the sacredness of the holy scriptures if one does not implement their message in one's everyday life. But the Jews, the very people who held the Torah in such high esteem, were unable to abide the Prophet's exhortations.

The reason for such a reaction on their part was that they had allowed self-interest and worldly ambitions to rule their lives, but passed themselves off as bearers and upholders of the true faith. As long as the religion served to consolidate their worldly status, they welcomed it, but were loath to accept the message of truth – presented to them in all its purity – which they saw as a threat to the hegemony they had secured for themselves on the basis of religion. It was their egoism which came in the way. Instead of being the first to believe in it, they rejected the message as well as the messenger, subjecting God's prophets to scorn and victimization. They called them imposters and even went to the extent of killing them.

The Jews of Arabia did just the same thing with the Prophet Mohammad. They had seen prophecies of the coming of a final prophet in their scriptures, and had eagerly anticipated his arrival. When he comes, they used to say, we will join with him in a grand alliance against the pagans and idolaters. But these proved to be empty words on their part, a pretence aimed at consolidating their status as undisputed guardians of divine faith. When the Prophet came, the truth of their position was exposed. They were

shown to be steeped in prejudice, loathe to believe in a prophet who did not come from the Jewish race. They could not dispute the veritable signs that the Qur'an presented in support of his prophethood; all they could say was: "It all sounds very impressive, but our ancestral religion is good enough for us: Our hearts are sealed and we will not accept anything besides the faith we have inherited from our forefathers."

"When it is said to them: 'Believe in what God has revealed,' they reply: 'We believe in what was revealed to us.' But they deny what has since been revealed, although it is the truth, corroborating their own Scriptures. Say: 'Why did you kill the prophets of God, if you are true believers? Moses came to you with clear signs, but in his absence you worshipped the calf and committed evil.' When we made a covenant with you and raised the Mount above you (saying): 'Hold firmly to what We have given you and hear (Our Commandments),' they replied: 'We hear, but disobey.' For their unbelief, they were made to imbibe (the love of) the calf into their very hearts. Say: 'Evil is that to which your faith prompts you if you are indeed believers.' Say: 'If the abode of the Hereafter with God is for you alone to the exclusion of all others then invoke death if you are sincere.' But they will never invoke death, because of what they did; and God knows the evil-doers. Indeed, you will find that they love this life more than other men: more than the pagans do. Every one of them wishes to live a thousand years. But this prolonged life will surely not save him from (due) punishment. God is watching over their actions (2:91-96)."

The Jews were not ready to accept the Quran because they thought they were already rightly guided. They were sure that the very fact that they were Israelites would be enough to earn them salvation. But in fact this was more a feeling of ethnic superiority on their part than an affinity for truth: the Jews had been recipients of divine scriptures in the past so they felt that they, and only they, were custodians of truth. If they had really been on the path of truth, they would have rushed to accept the pure, untainted version of it revealed in the Quran, especially since it confirmed the prophecies in their own scriptures; they would have realized that once the Quran had been revealed, its teachings should be followed rather than those which had been handed down to them by their forefathers.

The fact that the Jews were not really concerned with truth is proved by their own history. It was they who had slain their own prophets, such as Zakaria and John the Baptist, the only reason for their action being that these prophets had criticized the Jews' mode of living, and sought to bring them back to the divine way (Nehemiah 9:26). They had seen Moses perform undeniable miracles, but when he left them to spend forty days on Mount Sinai they started worshipping the calf; it had only been his personal authority which had kept them in line. When the Mount was raised threateningly above their heads, they temporarily agreed to do "all that the Lord hath spoken" (Exodus, 19:5, 8, 16, 18), but, after that, most of them returned to their disobedient ways. If they had really been seeking God, their attention would have been entirely focused on the life after death; but, in fact, they are more attracted than anyone to the life of this world.

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### They found wealth, but still searching for happiness

Since the Second World War, Japan has acquired the second largest gross national product in the world. But as a private economic policy group reported in late 1984, material wealth has caused an erosion of Japan's resources of spiritual affluence. So concerned has the government become with the spiritual satisfaction of its citizens that it is considering setting up a special department to monitor the happiness of the Japanese people. Under the plan civil servants would compile a Net National Satisfaction Index, balancing miserable Japanese against cheerful ones and hoping that the latter come out on top. Discovering exactly what the Japanese have got is another aim of the NNSI plan – the index would publish statistics on foreign holidays, health, unemployment and other social trends. A final equation would mix the people's attitudes with their state of health and wealth and produce an official "national happiness level."

(*The Guardian Weekly*, October 14, 1984)

## Muhammad: The Prophet of Islam

### Part I Chapter V (Contd.)

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Among the expeditions that the Prophet Mohammad made was the one known as *Zat-ul-Riq'a* (4AH). An incident that occurred during this expedition, and which has been recorded in *Bukhari*, as well as in biographies of the Prophet, is related by Jabir.

A member of the Banu Ghatfan tribe, Ghaurath Ibn Al-Harith, once asked his people: "Would you like me to kill Mohammad?" "Of course," they replied, "but how will it be possible?" "I will catch him unawares, and kill him," Ghaurath replied, and then set off on his errand. Soon he reached the camp of Mohammad and his companions. There were trees and bushes in the area, and the Muslims were lying in their shade. The Prophet, too, had hung his sword up on the branch of a tree, and was resting in its shade, when Ghaurath approached. When the tribesman saw the Prophet lying all alone, with his sword hanging on a branch, he went and seized the sword. Drawing it, he advanced on the Prophet. "Who will save you from me?" he challenged. "God," the Prophet replied. "Take a look at the sword I am holding in my hand," Ghaurath went on. "Don't you fear it?" "Of course not," the Prophet said. "Why should I fear it, when I know that God will save me?" The supreme confidence of the Prophet's reply proved too much for Ghaurath, and his courage left him. Instead of attacking the Prophet, he put the sword back in its sheath and returned it to the Prophet. The Prophet made him sit down, and called his companions. When they arrived, they saw the Prophet, with the tribesman sitting next to him. The Prophet told them the whole story. Ghaurath was petrified, expecting to be killed at any moment. But the Prophet let him go without any punishment (*Seerat Ibn Hisham*. Vol. III, *Tafseer Ibn Kathir*, Vol. I).

Those who put absolute trust in God do not fear anything or anyone. The faith that God, a Live and All-Powerful Being, is always there to help one, makes one bold in the face of every other power. A person's greatest strength, when faced with an enemy, is fearlessness. Have no fear of any foe, and he himself will start fearing you.

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The Battle of the Trench (5AH), also known as the Battle of the Armies, took place when Medina was attacked by various Arab tribes, including the Quraish and Ghatfan, and some Jewish tribes. One can gauge the ferocity of the onslaught from these words of the Quran:

"They attacked you from above and from below, so that your eyes were blurred, and your hearts leapt to your throats, and your faith in God was shaken. There the faithful were put to the proof; there they were severely afflicted" (33:10-11).



This fully-equipped army included 4,500 camels and 300 horses. They besieged Medina, cutting the city off from the outside world. So short were supplies that people began to starve. It was at this time that a companion complained of hunger to the Prophet: pulling up his shirt, he exposed a stone, tied to his belly. In reply, the Prophet pulled up his shirt: there were two stones tied to it.

When news of the impending attack reached the Prophet, he held consultations with his companions. Salman Farsi's view, – that the Muslims should combat the enemy from within the city's precincts – was accepted. At that time, Medina was enclosed on three sides, by mountains, forest and walls. It was exposed only on the north-west front. The Muslims decided to dig a trench on this open front, extending between two mountains. After six days of continual labour, the trench was dug. It proved so successful in holding the enemy back that it gave its name to the battle, the Battle of the Trench.

On reading of the Battle of the Trench, one is faced with a question: how was it that a small trench was able to hold the enemy back? It was only six metres long, with a depth of two and a half metres, and a width of about three – roughly the size of a small canal. For a fully-equipped army, a trench of this size presents no more of an obstacle than a ditch. They could easily have crossed it, and entered Medina. Later events show that the Muslims were within range of enemy archers, for Sa'ad Ibn Mu'az was actually hit by an enemy arrow. It is also clear from accounts that at least some of the enemy did in fact cross the trench. A group headed by Amr Ibn Abd Wud came on horseback to inspect the trench. Finding it narrower at one point, they jumped over it there on their horses. Then a duel took place between Amr Ibn Abd Wud and Ali in which Umr Ibn AbdWud was slain. The siege was lifted after nearly a month, following a violent storm. The enemy were so dazed by the sandstorm that at one point Abu Sufyan sat on his camel and started urging it on, but forgot to unite it.' But the question still remains: Why did a fully-equipped army of 10,000 men not cross the trench and enter Medina. There were only 3,000 inside the city. How could such a small force, ill-equipped as they were, have withstood the onslaught of the enemy?

The answer to this question lies in a law of God, which is to put awe and fear into the hearts of the enemy by enlarging the fighting power of the faithful in their eyes. This is what the Qur'an has to say on the, subject:

"We will put terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. They serve other gods for whom no sanction has been revealed" (3:151).

God helped the believers by putting fear into the hearts of their enemies on several occasions, one of which was the Battle of the Trench. In this campaign, the trench that the Muslims dug appeared before the enemy in a greatly enlarged form. But still the Muslims had to do the digging. They had at least to fashion a ditch with their own hands. If they had not done that much – if they had not wearied themselves digging a ditch – then how could God have enlarged it into a trench in the eyes of the enemy?

Present-day Muslim can also have the help which God provided to their predecessors; fear can be put into the hearts of their foes also. But, for this to happen, the Muslims must tread the path laid out by the Prophet and his companions. Those who follow any other path will be befriended only by the devil; they will never be able to avail of divine – succour. To be deserving of God's assistance one has to devote oneself entirely to truth; one has to lay down everything one has for the sake of truth, even if it means relinquishing one's position in favour of another, as the people of Medina did after the emigration of the Prophet to their town.

The conditions under which one can become deserving of divine succour are summed up in this verse of the Qur'an:

“Whoever helps God shall be helped by Him” (22:40).

One could put this another way and say: God helps those who help others. God will only come to our assistance if we treat others in the same manner as we ourselves seek to be treated by God. If we ourselves harm others, then how can we expect mercy from the Lord? If we persecute those whom we overpower, then on what grounds can we hope that God will come to our rescue when others overpower and oppress us? If a person in trouble seeks our help, and we do not come to his assistance, is God then going to assist us when we are in trouble and call to Him? In this world one is always strong in relation to some and weak in relation to others. This is how God puts us to the test. We seek God's help against those stronger than ourselves, but in order to receive it we must show compassion to those who are weaker than us. One who persecutes the weak can never be worthy of God's help against the strong. No amount of prayer and supplication will help him.

## The Prophet and His Companions

### Answering criticism without getting angry

A woman of the Banu Asad, whose name was Umm-e-Yaqub, came to Abdullah Ibn Masood. "I hear that you curse the tattooer, and the one who is tattooed," she said. "But I have read the Quran from beginning to end, and have found no mention of this matter. And I bet that even in your household this is being done." "Go to my house and have a look for yourself," Ibn Masood replied. She did so, and could find no sign of any tattoo marks. When she came back, Abdullah Ibn Masood said to her: "Have you not read in the Quran to take what the Prophet gives, and keep away from that which he forbids?" The woman replied that she had. "Well," Ibn Masood said, "this is something that the Prophet forbade."

### Not mentioning anyone with scorn

The Prophet was with Aisha in her chamber. In the course of conversation, she made fun of her co-wife, Safia, and ridiculed her dwarfishness. On hearing this, the Prophet's countenance altered. "You have uttered something which would pollute the colour of the sea were it to be mixed in its waters," he said to her.

### Keeping quiet and letting those who are in a position to speak do so

After the death of the Prophet, hypocrisy took root in Medina, and apostasy set in many parts of Arabia and Persia. The renegades made a plot in Nihevand, Iran. "The Prophet has died," they said, "and it was because of him that God used to help the Muslims." The successor of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, gathered the Muhajirs and Ansar together, and told them that these Arabs had ceased to pay what was due to the poor on their camels and goats. "They have renegaded on their faith," he said, "and are now plotting in Nihavand to attack you. They think that you have lost the one who used to entitle you to God's succour. Tell me what I should do now. I am just a common man, like any one of you. In fact, I am the least able to bear the burden of the caliphate." Abdullah Ibn Umar says that the companions sat in silence with their heads bowed for a long while after Abu Bakr had spoken. Only then did Umar Ibn Al-Khattab rise and begin to speak.

### Care in what one says

Umar Ibn Abdul Aziz was asked what he thought about the Muslims who had slain and been slain in the Battle of Siffeen. "Thank God that he kept my hand from spilling any blood on that day," he replied. "I do not want to pollute my tongue with it either."